

2016

4/6



A N  
E N Q U I R Y

INTO THE

A U T H E N T I C I T Y

OF THE

Poems ascribed to OSSIAN.

---

BY

W. S H A W, A.M. F.S.A.

Author of the *GALIC DICTIONARY and GRAMMAR.*

---

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR J. MURRAY, N<sup>o</sup> 32, FLEET-STREET.

---

M.DCC.LXXXI.



---

THINGS singularly novel, or of the most remote antiquity, seldom fail, in some degree, according to their intrinsic merit or collateral circumstances, of attracting the attention of mankind. Of this observation the poems ascribed to Ossian is a rare demonstration. Antiquity being the taste of the period wherein these productions appeared in public, they were everywhere, and by every body, read, and by many with admiration. The fragments the *translator* at first shewed to the world, raised the public expectations, insomuch that not only his expences were borne in a journey through the Highlands, by the literati in and about Edinburgh, to collect more, but

B the

the book was afterwards taken into every hand.

A variety of reasons occasioned with some, doubts of the authenticity of the fragments ; and many were thorough sceptics as to the poems of Fingal and Temora. — Hence the controversy between some of the Scotch and English literati, who affirmed, that they never existed in any other form than that in which we have seen them.

The ingenious and learned Dr. Johnson first started objections ; and those arose from the internal evidence of the poems against their authenticity, and other facts, which served to confirm the Doctor in his infidelity.

To the internal evidence much hath been elegantly said by Dr. Blair of Edinburgh ; and many seeming facts were produced to corroborate the whole. Dr. Johnson was too sincere a friend to truth, to accept of an elegant criticism by a professor of rhetoric as internal evidence, and letters, and *ipse dixits* from

from the Highlands for a demonstration of authenticity. He knew the poems were every where read, and that Caledonians, naturally partial to their country and its antiquities, were not “sturdy enough moralists” to disown an honour politically done them by a politically cunning *translator*.

To induce the public to buy his book, it was necessary to suit their present taste, which was antiquity, and to fix the date of his poem at a remote period: therefore he actually made a journey into the Highlands; and in his Introduction to his Fingal he says, that by *passing six months in the islands and western coasts of Scotland, together with the help of some manuscripts, he has been enabled to give the world these poems in their present form.* This was all the evidence he had to produce for their authenticity; which was enough, were it true, and had he immediately produced the originals, which any gen-

tleman of letters might expect to see, and the public had a right to be put in possession of. These, however, although promised by the *Editor*, have not yet emerged from Mr. Macpherson's strong box.

The rapid sale of the poems naturally enough flattered the editor, and the Scotch nation in general; and the Highlanders, whom they more immediately concerned, were singularly elated with this accession of *honour* and seeming proof of their antiquity and learning. Whilst editions were selling off, and some of the Scotch and English doubting their authenticity; and the Highlanders and their partizans, from the *love* of their country and their own *honour*, which they imagined concerned, were strenuously supporting, either with the pen or conversation, in every circle, the genuineness of Ossian; Mr. Macpherson had time to recollect himself, and to choose the

part that was most agreeable to his opening views and interest.

Being certain that the success of the book depended on imposing the authenticity on the public (which, as it afforded some entertainment, was not thought very dishonest) he confirmed the blind zeal of his countrymen, whose curiosity to investigate never carried them further than conversation, by exhibiting an old Irish manuscript, which neither himself nor they could decypher—or, if any wished to hear some lines recited, the specimen which he translated from English into Galic readily supplied him. Thus the Scotch, were led to defend his cause, and Dr. Blair was imposed on by others, to publish a dissertation on the subject; whilst Mr. Macpherson, ready to snatch those laurels that might best adorn his brow, sometimes insinuated he was the author, at other times confirmed his countrymen in what, for the honour of

their nation, they wished to prove true, but were at all times ready to believe.

In the year 1774, Dr. Johnson published an account of his journey to the Highlands and Islands, in which he gives the public his opinion of the genuineness of the poems ascribed to Ossian, and the conduct of the supposed translator towards the public.

“ I suppose, ” says the Doctor, “ my opinion of the Poems of Ossian are already discovered. — I believe, they never existed in any other form than that in which we have seen them. The editor, or author, never could shew the original, nor can it be shewn by any other. To revenge rational incredulity by refusing evidence, is a degree of insolence with which the world is not yet acquainted ; and stubborn audacity is the last refuge of guilt. It would be easy to shew “ it,

" it, if he had it ; but whence could it  
 " be had ? It is too long to be remem-  
 " bered, and the language formerly had  
 " nothing written. He has, doubtless,  
 " inserted names that circulated in po-  
 " pular stories, and may have translated  
 " some wandering ballads, if any can  
 " be found ; and the names, and some  
 " of the images, being recollected, make  
 " an inaccurate auditor imagine, with  
 " the help of some Caledonian bigotry,  
 " that he has formerly heard the whole.

" I asked a very learned minister in  
 " Sky, who had used all arts to make  
 " me believe the genuineness of the  
 " book, whether at last he believed it  
 " himself ? but he would not answer.  
 " He wished me to be deceived, for the  
 " honour of his country ; but would  
 " not directly nor formally deceive me.  
 " Yet has this man's testimony been  
 " publicly produced, as of one that held  
 " Fingal to be the work of Ossian.

“ It is said, that some men of integrity have heard parts of it; but they all heard them when they were boys; and it was never said that any of them could recite six lines. They remember names, and perhaps some proverbial sentiments, and, having no distinct ideas, coin a resemblance without an original. The persuasion of the Scots, however, is far from universal; and in a question so capable of proof, why should doubt be suffered to continue? The editor has been heard to say, that part of the poem has been received by him in the Saxon character. He has then found, by some peculiar fortune, an unwritten language, written in a character which the natives probably never beheld.

“ I have yet supposed no imposture but in the publisher; yet I am far from certainty, that some translations have

“ have not been lately made, that may  
“ now be obtruded as parts of the ori-  
“ ginal work. Credulity on one part,  
“ is a strong temptation to deceit on  
“ the other, especially to deceit of which  
“ no personal injury is the consequence,  
“ and which flatters the author with his  
“ own ingenuity.

“ The Scots have something to plead  
“ for their so easy reception of an im-  
“ probable fiction. They are seduced  
“ by their fondness for their supposed  
“ ancestors. — A Scotchman must be a  
“ very sturdy moralist, who does not  
“ love Scotland better than truth: he  
“ will always love it better than en-  
“ quiry; and, if falsehood flatters his  
“ vanity, will not be very diligent to  
“ detect it. Neither ought the English  
“ to be much influenced by Scotch  
“ authority; for of the past and present  
“ state of the whole Earfe nation, the  
“ Lowlanders are at least as ignorant as  
“ ourselves. To be ignorant is painful;  
“ but

“ but it is dangerous to quiet our uneasiness by the delusive opiate of hasty persuasion.

“ But this is the age in which those who could not read, have been supposed to write; in which the giants of antiquated romance have been exhibited as realities. If we know little of the ancient Highlanders, let us not fill the vacuity with *Ossian*. If we have not searched *Magellanic* regions, let us, however, forbear to people them with Patagons.”

From this circumstance, one would readily think that a youthful and ambitious mind would rejoice at such notice taken of him in a publication by the first writer of the age, and grasp at an opportunity of deriving consequence from disputing with so superior an antagonist. But, strange to tell! when the public might have looked for a deposit of the manuscript, or a publication of the original, according to promise, on this

this open and public declaration of a forgery, Mr. Macpherson's irascibility flamed forth, and he only had recourse to the single argument that always remains for the defence of imposture, the *argumentum ad hominem*, or *ba-culinum*. He wrote accordingly a letter, the particulars of which I have not been able to learn; but they were such as extracted from the Doctor the following answer :

“ Mr. James Macpherson,

“ I received your foolish and impudent letter.—Any violence that shall be attempted upon me, I will do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me: for I will not be hindered from exposing what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian. What would you have me retract? I thought your work an imposture; I think so still; and for my opinion, I have given reasons

“ reasons which I here dare you to  
 “ refute.—Your abilities, since your  
 “ Homer, are not so formidable; and  
 “ what I hear of your morality, in-  
 “ clines me to credit rather what you  
 “ shall prove, than what you shall  
 “ say.

“ S. JOHNSON.”

At this kind of argument, youth might prevail over age; but the original cause is generally weakened, if it does not shew that no better can be produced, by such an appeal.—For the honour of my country, and for the sake of a language on which I have bestowed so much pains, I am sorry the editor of Ossian has had no better method of defence. Had the heroes, however, met, it is likely posterity, with greater certainty, might look for and examine at home the fields where Fingal and Swaran, Robin Hood and Little John, fought their single combat, without giving the curious

curious the trouble of exploring the Ultonian Plains or Marischal Wood. For bulk and stature, I would think it would be no bad representation of those ancient heroes ; and in this I am sure they would excel them, as far as real heroes do those of the imagination.

When the ebullitions of irascibility had subsided, reason had reassumed her seat, and the incompetency of the *argumentum baculinum* to prove a literary truth was manifest, the next resource was to cause Mr. Becket subscribe an advertisement in a public news-paper, to this purpose :

“ That, during six weeks after the  
“ first publication of the Poems, the  
“ original manuscript lay at his shop,  
“ for the inspection of the curious.

(Signed)      “ T. BECKET.”

This MS. was never seen by any person. Why was it not left there at the time the advertisement was published ?

The

The reason is plain—as he had no MS. of the poems, he was afraid that some Irish gentleman might inspect it, and find, in place of Ossian's poetry, the genealogy of his own family, and his relation with some one of the monarchs of Ireland. For it is very well known, that the Earse dialect of the Galic was never written nor printed, until Mr. Macfarlane, late minister of Killinvir, Argyleshire, published, in 1754, a translation of *Baxter's Call to the unconverted*. Since his time there have been some songs and books of piety printed. This I can easily prove, because no Earse MS. ever was or can be produced: and although the Psalms of David, and Confession of Faith, have been translated into Galic, it is well known that it is neither the Earse spelling nor dialect, but written in the Irish Galic; and therefore not every where in the Highlands well enough understood, although sung in churches. It was first published in

in 1694, and was versified by the synod of Argyle: but the best-executed psalms are allowed to be done by the Romish clergy of the north of Ireland. Indeed I am apt to think the whole have; for the monkish clergy of Ireland had a variety of versions composed very early; besides, the Presbyterian clergy, in these early periods of the Reformation, were far from being learned; for, on account of the troubles of the times, the unsettled state of the church, and parting with all ecclesiastical revenues, and from the scarcity of pastors, hands were suddenly laid on those who could assume an asperity of manners, or pretend to spiritual influences.

Lieut. Col. Vallancey, in his Grammar of the Irish, says, “ Mr. Macpherson, in his poem of Temora, p. 184, has given us a few lines of the original in Earse; *the words, he tells us, are not, after the Irish manner, bristled over with unnecessary quiescent consonants, so disagreeable*

disagreeable to the eye, and which rather embarrass than assist the reader. It is difficult to understand Mr. Macpherson's meaning in this passage, unless he intends it as an apology for the omission of some radical Celtic consonants, which have ever been a stumbling-block to the modern Scots. However, in contradiction to this flourish, Mr Macpherson has introduced no less than twenty aspirated consonants, with the hiatus he annexed to them, in the first twelve lines he has favoured us with of the original poem. The reader will judge whether choille *Earſe*, c'oille *Iriſh*, thairis *Earſe*, or t'airis *Iriſh*, iulluir-huil *Earſe*, or fiolair-s'uil *Iriſh*, do most embarrass the Celtic reader; and to all others, it is of no consequence how these words are written. The corruption of the Celtic in this example is worthy of notice, and in my opinion is a strong proof of the novelty of this poem; or, if it be ancient, it is a proof of the unlettered ignorance

ignorance of the ancient Gallic Scots. In line 4, illuir-huil, i. e. eagle-eyed, should have been fiolair-s'uil, or, in the Earse manner, fhiallair-shuil, &c. The word has been corrupted into jolar both in Earse and Irish, but never was written julluir: and Mr. Macpherson is referred to the translation of the Galic psalms, by the Synod of Argyle, begun in 1659, and published at Glasgow 1765; in psalm 103, v. 5, he will find this line:

*Mar islar luath nan speur;*

which corrects the fault in the 4th line of the poem of Temora.

*Mar illuir-shuil greine nan speur.*

Again, psalm xi. 4.

*Is leir da shuilibb, &c.*

If we were to criticise on every corrupt word in the twelve lines before us, it would require many pages; we shall therefore defer that until we are favoured with a sight of the original."

These observations, from a man of so much knowledge in Celtic learning as Col. Vallancey possessest, is another argument to confirm me in what I always believed, that the specimen given by Mr. Macpherson is his own translation from the original English. And I can easily prove that these lines have never been known to any Highlander in Scotland, before he published them ; but to my certain knowledge, within these few years, an illiterate Highland porter, or cady of Edinburgh, has got them by heart, being frequently read to him by a gentleman zealous to support the imposture. This gentleman is himself an *ingenious* translator, of whom I shall have occasion to make mention hereafter. If Mr. Macpherson ever intends to publish a Galic version, he would do well to attend to the true orthography of the old Galic, especially if he wishes to continue the imposture. Many of the Scots agree with the Colonel's observation. Professor Macleod, of Glasgow,

gow, in a letter to me, begged “ that in my Grammar of that language, I should not throw away the radical consonants, nor apply the powers of the letters in English to Galic writing, as Mr. Macpherson did in the specimens he gave us of Temora.”

In this situation the matter has been left by the Editor, to be controverted between the Scotch and English. Unfortunately, however, for the cause of the advocates for the authenticity, the most sensible, disinterested, and considerable part of the Scotch, have declared their doubts. The silence of the translator, if he had any thing to say, was absurd and ungrateful, both to his country and those gentlemen who supported and suggested to him the original plan. Dr. Blair, of all men, has the greatest reason to be displeased, who has been imposed on, and led to write in defence of a forgery.

But although the author would produce no sort of evidence, individuals

made it a national cause; and several books have been published, to establish as genuine, what they themselves secretly disbelieved, never saw, and of which they know nothing, excepting some of the names which are current in the fables of the country.

I could wish to be able to reduce this little treatise to method, and to advert to all the authors who have attempted to support the authenticity severally; but as they use the same arguments, only differing in degree, these I will disprove in order as they occur.

As Dr. Blair's Dissertation was the first publication on the subject, and the only one that has offered facts, I shall begin with it. I have nothing to say of the merit or demerit of the criticism, because that will be the same, whether genuine or false; but I will briefly advert to whatever he has said, to prove the poems the composition of Ossian.

To prove them by internal evidence, the Doctor says, " In their battles, it  
" is

“ is evident that drums, trumpets, and “ bagpipes were not known nor used.” I believe, as well as the Doctor, that drums are modern, and that bagpipes are not very ancient; and Mr. Macpherson would take care to introduce none of these. But trumpets were both known and used; and the author, knowing a trumpet to be the most ancient, makes use of it, and commonly calls it the War-horn of Fingal. In this particular the Doctor’s argument either falls, or militates against itself.—“ Even a mountain, the sea, or a lake, when Ossian has occasion to mention them,” says the Doctor, “ though only in a simile, are for the most part particularized; it is the hill of Cromla, the storm of the sea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego.” The author surely would not be so uncircumspect as to use the name of Parnassus, Scylla, and Charybdis, or the reeds of the Red Sea. This is no more than what every poet, and in every

country, has done; and this *internal* evidence proves nothing.

“ To suppose that two or three hundred years ago, when we well know the Highlands to have been *in a state of gross ignorance* and barbarity, there should have arisen in that country a poet of such exquisite genius, and of such deep knowledge of mankind, and of history, as to divest himself of the ideas and manners of his own age, and to give us a just and natural picture of a state of society ancienter by a thousand years; one who could support this counterfeited antiquity through such a large collection of poems, without the least inconsistency; and who, possessed of all this genius and art, had at the same time the self-denial of concealing himself, and of ascribing his own works to an antiquated bard, without the imposture being detected, is a supposition that transcends all bounds of credibility.”

In this sentence I think the Doctor has just

just reason to apprehend the virulent resentment of Mr. Macnicol, and his embellisher, for a compliment more gross than any that came from Dr. Johnson. “ Highlands well known to have been in a state of gross ignorance and barbarity !” Mr. Macnicol will not allow that the Highlands was ever in a state either of “ ignorance or barbarity ;” nor indeed do I see any reason the Doctor has favoured us with, why we should conclude the Highlands was in greater barbarity in the 15th than in the 2d century, or why there should not be as good an *Ossian* in one age as in another. As for the self-denial of the author, it was only for a year or two, in order to sell as many editions as possible ; for he well knew that they would lose a great part of their merit, so soon as it was known they were modern.—But now that the palate of the public is sated, that he has got the copy sold, and the money in his pocket, he allows the zeal of his country to at-

tempt establishing what he neither wishes, nor can himself prove.

“ Another circumstance,” says the Doctor, “ is the absence of religious ideas”—*Often has* a mythology. The author knew that was necessary to constitute an epic poem; and genuine history instructing him when the Christian religion was introduced into Ireland and Scotland, it was natural to suppose he would, as much as possible, avoid any allusions to it. In this, however, he has oftener than once failed; for in Temora we find the Christian expressions, “ peace to thy soul,” “ blest be “ thy soul.” But the religion of that æra was not what Mr. Macpherson tells us.—His mythology he has raised entirely on the superstition of the second sight, heightened by poetry, and the stories of ghosts, apparitions, &c. so common in the fifteenth century, which he affects so much to despise; but to which, however, he is indebted for all the materials he has had.

The

The other great spirits to which allusions sometimes are made, is nothing less nor more than the common Highland idea of the Devil, who is believed to raise every storm, and go abroad with it. All these notions are still prevalent in the mountains, and a proper part of a mythology. In short, the whole machinery is nothing but the superstition of the Highlands, poetically embellished.

The spirit of Loda is ingeniously translated from Ireland into a Scandinavian god, taken from a tale called *Muirarlach mor o Laidban*, Mr. Macpherson, not perhaps knowing that *Laidban* was the Irish name of Leinster, turns it to Loda, and calls it a part of Scandinavia. The tale makes Muirarlach a sort of monster, and sometimes a knight-errant engaging a windmill, and then a giant, striding from hill to hill across Erin. It afforded, however, to an author, a good hint; and Mr. Macpherson accordingly conjured it to the spirit

spirit of Loda. This tale is common in the Highlands to this day.—Allusions to clans, for the same reasons, common understanding would teach to avoid.

An objection, which has been started by Dr. Percy, Dean of Carlisle, is, “ that although the *wolf* and the *bear* were natives of this island, in those early days, yet neither is ever mentioned by this fictitious Ossian. The most modern epic songs, and those *Irish Ossians* of the 15th century, as the *modern Ossian* calls them, abound with similes of this sort: and a hero is frequently compared to a wolf or bear.” This is a reasonable and just objection, of which the author was not aware.—We can suppose no period of society, when cows, sheep, and goats were not known; for by all travellers, and from every history, it appears that brutes did propagate much faster than mankind; and wherever the human species have been found, there also quadrupeds existed. Yet Mr. Macpherson, in order to support the great antiquity

antiquity of his poems, in a note, p. 350, vol. i. introduces a short poem, with *modern* and *unpoetical* allusions to *goats* and *herds*, *cows seeking shelter*, and *shepherds wandering* after their flocks.

Dr. Blair very ingeniously takes advantage of this circumstance, in his Dissertation, p. 31; and, contrary to other criticks, thinks it very *unpoetical* to introduce sheep, cows, and goats, whilst he delights in the description of Cuchullin's chariot, "the children of the Rein!" Why might not cows, goats, and sheep live on the mountains of Scotland, and the plains of Erin, as well as the "children of the Rein," or the deer? Was there any thing in the soil or climate to refuse sustenance to those animals, any more than to horses? Do not all these live together at this day? The bison, a species of wild cow, the peculiar native of the forests and mountains of Scotland, although now extinct, was certainly common in those days; yet no mention is made of it.

Hunting

Hunting the wild boar is often mentioned in the few scraps of ancient poetry that still remain; which Mr. Macpherson makes little of, because, according to his account, they "want "age," being the composition of the 15th century; although the genuine Ossian knew nothing of it: unless indeed we suppose that brutes did not multiply so fast in the first ages as man. The contrary is true.—It were too much to suppose that the author could be so happy as to succeed in every thing, and make the deception compleat. In an imposture, a man cannot shut every avenue to detection. However, it has succeeded far enough; a variety of editions have been sold; and the author has acquired credit by his ingenuity.—That was the great desideratum. I, however, envy it not.

*O! grant me honest fame, or grant me none.*

By many it hath been said, that the similes

similes of Ossian are taken from so remote a period of society, as to be a strong proof of the antiquity of the poem. I grant the similes in general are from nature. And why? Because the country described as the scene of action at this day, and its inhabitants, are in some degree but emerging from a state of nature. Thither the author went to see the face of the country, and the appearances of nature; besides that he was born and lived long in the mountains and vallies. Hence that seriousness which pervades the whole, and which is familiar to every Highlander; and is one great reason why every one of them is so ready to believe the poems authentic. Any Englishman may go down, and see these phenomena in the elements and face of the country; of which he may lay up a number, and write, when he comes home, poetry of the same nature. This indeed has already been done at home, without the trouble of travelling.

I remember, when I travelled that country three years ago, to have sat down on a hill ; and, the scene being favourable, in a poetic mood, I jingled together upon paper, with suitable invented Galic names, the epithets of blue-eyed, meek-eyed, mildly-looking, white-bosomed, dark-brown locks, noble, generous, valiant, tears, spears, darts, hearts, harts, quivers, bows, arrows, helmets, steel, streams, torrents, noble deeds, other times, bards, chiefs, storms, songs, &c. and produced a little poem, which reads pretty smoothly ; and, if I had a mind to publish it, it would be no difficult matter to persuade some people I had translated it from the Galic : for I might translate a stanza of it into Earse, shew it to the inquisitive, and say I had the rest by me ; after which they would never enquire.

In this manner a collection hath been made up and published at Edinburgh, three years ago, by an ingenious *translator,*

lator, Mr. Clarke, entitled *The Caledonian Bards*. It has been reviewed at London, and adduced as an argument for the genuineness of Fingal. Mr. Clarke, when I charged him with it, confessed that it was entirely made up. — One of the poems of that collection is happily set off with the title of *The Words of Woe*. The author told me, all he had for the ground-work of it was, a song called *Jurram na truaidhe*, composed on a late emigration of the Highlanders to America. In the same manner the rest of the collection was made up. It, however, does Mr. Clarke's ingenuity credit; although, in general, for the honour of his country, he also wishes to carry on the fraud of Ossian. If the public would continue to purchase liberally, there is no knowing what number of poems we might be favoured with from the Earfe! But, unfortunately, the public taste in this way seems now to be fated.

“ The time of my departure is nigh,”  
is

is a sentence of Ossian.—Did not the author of it read the Scriptures? And it is well known the Bible has not been so long as two centuries translated into Irish; for in Earse, it has not yet appeared: and the *genuine* Ossian, Mr. Macpherson himself acknowledgeth to have been totally ignorant of *Roman* and *Greek learning*.

Another powerful objection to the genuineness of Ossian is, that, excepting a few names, all the characters in that poem are the creation of the translator, and are not at all known in the popular tales of the Highlands. Swaran is never once mentioned; but Magnus, a more modern name, is represented as engaging Fingal, who is a real but antient captain.—No such kingdom as Morven was ever known in the west of Scotland. The name Morven, although at home it is called *Morrainna*, sounds well, and, for no other reason, suited the author's plan, though it is never once mentioned in any of their

their tales or songs. The district known at this day by that name, is only a part of the parish of that name. — Selma is not at all known in Scotland. When I asked, and particularly those who were possessed of any poetry, songs, or tales, who Fionn was?—for he is not known by the name of Fingal by any—I was answered, that he was an Irishman, if a man; for they sometimes thought him a giant, and that he lived in Ireland, and sometimes came over to hunt in the Highlands. This is the universal voice of all the Highlanders, excepting those who are possessed of abilities and knowledge to peruse the work of Mr. Macpherson, and are taught by nationality to support an idle controversy.

The truth is, this Fingal is no more than, as hath often already been observed, an Irish chief of the third century, who signalized himself against the northern invaders of those days, and, being made captain, or chief commander, of an army or militia, necessary to

be kept under arms for some years ; and the Irish and Scotch Celts being one and the same people ; had occasion, at different times, to pass over to Scotland, where he was joined by the natives, for the mutual defence of both countries. Like a true Scotchman, in order to make his composition more acceptable to his countrymen, Mr. Macpherson changes the name of Fionn Mac Cumhal, the Irishman, into Fingal ; which indeed sounds much better, and sets him up a Scotch king over the ideal kingdom of Morven, in the west of Scotland.—It had been a better argument for the authenticity, if he had allowed him to be an Irishman, and made Morven an Irish kingdom, as well as make Ireland the scene of his battles : but, as he must need make the hero of an epic poem a great character, it was too great honour for any other country but Scotland to have given birth to so considerable a personage.—All the authentic histories of Ire-

land give a full account of Fingal, or Fionn Mac Cumhal's actions ; and any one who will take the trouble to look at Dr. Keating, or any other history of that country, will find the matter related as above : whereas in the *Chronicon Scotorum*, from which the list of the Scotch kings is taken, and the pretended manuscripts they so much boast of to be seen in the Hebrides, there is not one syllable said of such a name as Fingal. A man so thirsty after fame, would surely court an opportunity of meeting the cotemporary Romans, who certainly would not fail to make mention of so great a hero. We will readily grant, that part of the contests in Ireland, and the war with Lochlin, is founded in history, because all the annals of Ireland have handed it down to us ; but the author, in order to serve his purpose, wrests facts as they may best serve his end, and, apprehensive of a future detection, labours with great zeal to destroy the credit of all Irish

history, and, with a few bold strokes of his pen, obliterate all the Celtic learning ever known any where, in order to make way for a new system of Celtic emigration and Hebridian and Fingalian history, in the Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland, of which nothing was ever heard before. This book was published on purpose to support the imposture of Fingal.

Whilst I thus freely speak my sentiments (for I have had access to know and understand the language as well as any man living ; having bestowed more labour and expence upon it than all that went before me) I am not ignorant of doing what may, though innocently, incur not only the displeasure, but the resentment, of some of my compatriots, as derogating much from their supposed national honour. I profess myself to be an enquirer after truth ; and, as the subject in hand is a literary topic, in itself of little importance, it may

may be discussed without giving reasonable offence to the sensible, liberal, and discerning part of my countrymen ; and, if I have their approbation, I shall feel little anxiety from the apprehension of the malignant virulence and personalities that may issue from the illiberal few. I never yet could dissemble, nor personate a hypocrite ; *truth* has always been *dearer* to me than my country ; nor shall I ever support an ideal national honour founded on an imposture, though it were to my hindrance. — I can shew Dr. Johnson that there is *one* Scotchman who loves *truth* better than his country, and that I am a *sturdy* enough *moralist* to declare it, though it should mortify my Caledonian vanity. I would therefore wish to be considered as a person who, though I have as much of the *amor patriæ* as I think is a virtue, and though I have the honour to mention the immortal name of Doctor Johnson amongst my friends, and have no quarrel with Mr. Macpherson, un-

biaffed and uninfluenced. Besides, I am sure Mr. Macpherson no longer wishes the world should think the poems any thing but his own manufacture; for to me he has oftener than once observed, “ it was more creditable “ to be an author than a translator.”—I would despise myself, were I capable of supporting an untruth for the friendship of any man, or of overturning it, were it in my power, if I had a grudge against another. But, as this is not the case, the public may look upon me as under no bias whatsoever, influenced by no partiality, nor afraid to tell the truth. I think proper to speak in this clear and open manner, and prefix my name, because I know that some men imagine there is no moral turpitude in anonymously publishing one thing in a pamphlet, whilst they think and believe the contrary.—But to resume my subject:—The author of the Dissertation, after some elegant criticism on the poem, concludes with observing,  
 “ that

" that although he understands not the original, yet the *translator* seems to have been animated with no small portion of Ossian's spirit."—I believe the whole of Ossian's spirit; for no translation was ever well done, at least equal to the original. This is said by Mr. Macpherson himself to be literal; and Dr. Blair says, it is animated with a great portion of Ossian's spirit. Is not this a strong argument it is no translation? and the Doctor, how strenuously soever he has endeavoured to make them appear authentic, must have known better; for some say it is the promiscuous production of the Doctor and Mr. Macpherson. (Vide Diff. of Dr. Blair, p. 218.)

Before I have done with internal evidence, I must take notice of what has been said by Mr. Smith, in a late dissertation on the genuineness of Ossian's poems. This gentleman, although a man of great modesty and worth, yet, warmed by national zeal to secure the

honour of an ancient Offian to the Highlands, and strip the brow of the modern one of those laurels he will one day, in spite of all their efforts, claim as his own, avails himself of the ignorance of the world concerning the history of the Highlands in remote ages, and would have us receive conjectures for facts; well knowing, that as we are more ignorant of these times, there is greater latitude for conjecture. Conclusions, however, drawn from conjecture, are vague, and will be received as truths only by those who wish them true. He, in his Dissertation, puts us off with giving us a pretty account of the effects of music on the human mind in former times; as if there was no such thing in our own days as seeing any emotions produced by it. I can tell Mr. Smith, that I have often seen many weep to music, and forgot I did so myself, until I discovered it by the number of my tears. The tears of joy and sorrow are equally at the command of music.

music. Human nature, by improvement, may be somewhat varied, but will, in general, continue always the same. Mr. Smith has thrown no new light on this controversy; but only weakened it, by idly adding to the number of dissertations that avail nothing. I wish he had taken up a subject more worthy his labour.

At one time he talks of the age of Fingal as an age of hunting, as best suits his purpose; at another, makes mention of it as an age of arts, civilization, and commerce. “The only “business of men was hunting; the “women wove the robe for their love.” People will do and say much, and often more than is true, to enforce the belief of what they themselves wish to be true, but are not able to establish. All men, however, are not alike credulous. An enquirer after truth, always expects evidence before he gives his assent to a proposition; and, in order to be able himself to give an account of the

the faith that is in him, will never believe as true, upon conjectural and probable evidence, that which facts alone must prove. That the question in hand is of that nature, is evident:—yet it is very different with the friends of Ossian: they wish the world to believe, for the honour of their country, because Mr. Macpherson made Fingal a Scotch, and not an Irish man.

Mr. Smith then tells the names and residence of men in his neighbourhood, “whom he has heard, for weeks together, repeat ancient poems, many of them Ossian’s;” but has not given us one line of them as a fact in his Dissertation; nor, were I to call on him to produce the Galic of any forty lines, in either Fingal or Temora, he could not produce them. Then an ingenious apology would have been contrived:—the man had *died of a fever*, or had emigrated to America. Some such mischance, notwithstanding all their disquisitions and noise, has befallen the whole of

of them ; for all the Highlands has not yet been able to shew three lines, excepting those Mr. Macpherson published as a specimen, and which, in reality, is his own translation. If they believe themselves, let them enjoy it, and not attempt to bully the world into a belief of that for which no sort of evidence has yet been produced.

He tells us, “ Mr. Macpherson has “ always been readiest to shew his ori- “ ginals to the best judges.” I deny it. Mr. Macpherson often promised me a sight of them. — I believe, without vanity, I may say I understand the Galic as well as any man living ; for I wrote a Grammar and Dictionary of it ; and yet, although he appointed, at least at six different times, a day for shewing them to me, and I as often waited upon him, there was always some apology made : — the manuscripts were at his house in the country ; or mislaid ; or the key lost ; or I should see them some other time. Why did he promise to shew

shew them? And, since he promised, why not shew some? Let the public draw inferences. This is true; let Mr. Macpherson contradict it, if he can. Mr. Smith talks also of MSS. that contain these poems—Why apply so earnestly to the author for an edition, if they have them in these MSS. of their own? For a committee of the Highland Society has waited on Mr. Macpherson, to request the original should be printed.—But alas! not one line has yet been seen, excepting what the translator has made.

Professor Macleod, of Glasgow, is mentioned as a person who was allowed to compare some books of the original with the translation; and yet, in a conversation with me at London, who promised to purchase any number of lines, not under six, at the rate of 2*s. 6d.* each word, he could neither repeat a syllable, nor undertake to procure from Mr. Macpherson, although then in town, a single line. Thus fruitless hitherto

hitherto has been every attempt to discover a stanza of an original, excepting what has been translated from the English, to impose it as a specimen of an original.—Why not publish large extracts from those MSS. of which the authors of dissertations so much boast. If they heard formerly, and still (as they aver) know men that repeat them, why not take them down in writing, and publish them?—Are they afraid that the Highland public, which is so zealous to establish the authenticity, will not purchase? It cannot be believed.—But the reason is, they are not to be found.

Mr. Smith mentions Dr. Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, in which he says the Doctor confesseth that he himself heard pieces of it recited; and, being compared with the *translation*, exactly corresponded.—Dr. Percy does not understand a syllable of the Earſe, and therefore could be no judge. The truth is, Dr. Blair, and Professor Ferguson,

gufon, when Dr. Percy was at Edinburgh, took care to introduce a young student from the Highlands, who repeated some verses, of which Professor Ferguson said such and such sentences in Fingal were the *translation*. — Mr. Smith, if he looks into the second and third editions of the *Reliques*, will find the observation there no longer; and that Dr. Percy, on reflection, had just reason to suspect that this young student had previously been taught the part he recited; and the lines might as readily be any common song, as the original of Fingal; for they knew it was impossible for an Englishman to detect it: This author has annexed to his Dissertations some poems, ascribed to new, and hitherto unknown, poets. He confesses they are in some degree *altered* from what they were when he received them.—That “ he compared different “ editions, struck off several parts that “ were manifestly spurious, and brought “ together episodes that seemed to have “ a relation

“ a relation to one another.” This is a most excellent pretext for giving us a new poem from a few stanzas of original: and he takes further care to cover the imposture, by advancing “ that the “ current editions are much adulterated.” Dargo is the title of one of his poems. There are a very few stanzas of poetry in different parts of the Highlands upon this hero Dargo. It is of that sort which the author of Fingal would call the composition of the 15th century.—I have them in my possession; and in a small collection of Galic poems, which I have been preparing (for I also was about to be a translator!) I have made up a sort of a poem of some length from these few stanzas, entirely different from Mr. Smith’s, only that we both retain the same Dargo as our mutual hero. If sale could be expected for them, I should find it no difficult matter, in my notes, to give specimens of the *original*; and I am sure I would avoid giving those I received from the people,

people, because they cannot bear a translation. And indeed Mr. Smith gives us not those of the old poet, but those he made from his English original; the local phraseology, and the forced strain of which, to any discerning reader, point out the imposition. In short, Mr. Smith's and my little poem both retain the same name of Dargo, have received none of the incredible and marvellous feats of the few original lines, and are each of them as different from it, and from one another, as, perhaps, the sermons would be which he and I might write upon one text. The case is the same as to the rest of his collection. The original is promised, if subscribers enough appear in six months. He has done well to limit the time, in order to have it in his power, at the expiration of six months, to refuse it; by which means he will avoid the labour of translating the whole into Earse. But I hope those who are so anxious to be in possession of the *original*

original of *Ossian*, will not neglect to take Mr. Smith at his word. — If, however, the two copies do not fit each other better than the specimens already shewn us, and if the Galic poetry be not better, we shall not be at a loss to judge which is the original ; and when it appears, we shall not neglect pointing out the vulgarisms and local phraseology to the few of his countrymen that are judges of the language.

Names are quoted who have given the originals.—Some of those I am acquainted with ; and none of them (for nobody could be more diligent and inquisitive than I have been) could ever produce any thing but a few scattered fabulous stanzas, sometimes representing the heroes as men, at other times as giants ; sometimes probable, and often marvellous ; none of which can bear a translation. A fertile genius, however, might take up the names as the characters, and write a poem in English, which a Highlander, *who loved his country*

*try better than truth*, might make himself easily believe he had frequently heard before. In this manner hath been manufactured every translation, whether Mr. Clarke's, Mr. Macpherson's, or Mr. Smith's, that have hitherto appeared.

Mr. Macphail of Lorne, Mr. Macalaster of Tarbert, repeat some of the above fables, which may serve for a text for a man that can write in English. These men I have seen and conversed with; and although I listened a long time to their recitation of fables, &c. I found nothing worthy of a translation, without such extensive amendments and embellishments, as to make it entirely a new work. The Reverend Mr. Mac Dermid, of Glasgow, is mentioned as well acquainted with the original of Fingal, although he is not possessed of a single line of Ossian; and I believe he would purchase a few at the price I offered Professor Macleod.

To expect belief from the world,  
where

where there is no evidence for the truth of a proposition, is supposing it credulous indeed ; is a disrespect, if not an insult, to the understanding of the public. When the proposition to be proved is a fact, and not mere speculation, or matter of opinion, facts alone, not internal evidence, which always give latitude to conjecture and uncertainty on both sides, can be a reasonable proof ; and nothing less can procure the assent of the dispassionate and unbiased mind. That competent facts, although frequently challenged and called for, have not been hitherto produced by the supporters of this question, I can easily shew. Nor would I ever have taken the trouble to say a syllable on the subject, had the partizans of Mr. Macpherson allowed the dispute to die, and let the public entertain their own opinion of the matter. But by falsehoods to force us into a belief, because such and such people wish it, although no reasons are given is arrogance, not to be

overlooked ; besides, this now is the only time to ascertain the truth, whilst the *translator* is living, that the *original*, if he has it, may be produced, as the only incontrovertible evidence. It is this has extracted from me these observations. The more is written to prove the authenticity, the more clearly the imposture appears ; and these late *Remarks* and *Dissertations*, in place of supporting, have only shewn the absurdity of attempting to support a proposition, which, because it might bring some ideal credit to their country, first proceeded from Mr. Macpherson's mouth, and which, though the *translator* offers no argument, they wish to establish. I should have been as happy as any of my countrymen can be, to have it in my power to produce the *original*, and so satisfy the world ; but as not one line of it has hitherto been seen, but what Mr. Macpherson has favoured us with, imposed as a specimen, though actually translated from the original English, I

am

am so far a friend to truth, that I cannot permit an imposition to descend to posterity undetected. Had I been ignorant of the Galic, less credit might be expected to my narration of facts; but having written a grammatical Analysis and a Dictionary of it, it may be readily believed I should rejoice to have it in my power to produce the originals of these poems to the public, as the Dictionary and Grammar might, perhaps, be sought after, to help the curious in forming some opinion of the original. Thus it would be my interest to support the authenticity, did I think it honest. Nor shall it appear that I have been indolent, inactive, or uninquisitive after information.

In spring 1778, I set out from London, for the Highlands and Hebrides, to collect from songs, old sayings, the voice of the people, and manuscripts, if there should be any, vocables for the dictionary, which I have since published. I knew well the state of the country.

It was my resolution, in order to satisfy myself at least, to leave no stone unturned, and be in possession of these poems, if they existed. Not above 17 years had elapsed, since Mr. Macpherson had performed his first expedition thither. All the Highlanders who repeated poetry, I believed, had not emigrated, nor died; and we have been told that some manuscripts there were in the possession of some individuals. I was elevated with anticipated success; and it was my intention to have superseded Mr. Macpherson, by publishing an original, could it be had. I had resolved, had I met with any convincing evidence, to say something on the other side, to convert not only Dr. Johnson, but the public, by taking the affidavits of those who recited the poetry, and those who witnessed it taken down by me in writing, and to have these facts properly vouched by the ministers of the parishes, and neighbouring justices, where such transactions might happen; and

and in this manner publish them. Nay, the original signatures of the ministers and justices I intended to have had recognized at Edinburgh, and certified there by people of consideration, whose vouchers of it could not be doubted at London. And I am confident, notwithstanding the epithets of “stubborn “ infidelity,” “hatred of the Scotch,” “refusing credit to Highland narration,” so commonly bestowed on him by the illiberal, Dr. Johnson would believe me, and be converted.

Many mountains I traversed, many vallies I explored, and into many humble cottages I crept on all four, to interrogate their inhabitants. I wandered from island to island, wet, fatigued, and uncomfortable. No labour I thought too much, no expence too great, whilst I flattered myself with converting the disbelieving Doctor Johnson, recovering some of the poetry of Ossian, and stripping Mr. Macpherson’s brow of what I then used to call them, “stolen bays;” for

I then believed there might be an original, and that he rather wished to appear the *author* than the *translator*. As nature, when she denies one sense or faculty, is commonly bountiful by giving another in uncommon perfection, I particularly enquired for the blind, who are often blest with a retentive memory, and frequently find their account in narration. I made many deviations to their obscure retreats; and was frequently engaged in long discourses with the blind, the lame, and the aged. It was soon, however, rumoured that I came from London, was in pay from his Majesty, and therefore they set a high value on what every one had hitherto received for nothing, at least for a snuff of tobacco. Tobacco, therefore, and whisky, were necessary to cheer the spirits, and raise their enthusiasm for recitation; besides some money for their trouble. When these were brought from a distance, so much must be allowed for the person that was supposed to be left at home

to

to work in his stead ; a certain price for his own recitation, previously stipulated ; tobacco and whisky, to prepare and excite recitative faculties ; something to the person that was sent for him ; and, if lame or blind, for those that carried or conducted him. This, when searches elsewhere prevented my waiting on him at his abode. Thus I spared not labour nor expence to procure knowledge ; but found myself not a little mortified, when all they could repeat was nothing but a few fabulous and marvellous verses ; or stories concerning Fionn Mac Cumhal, alias Fingal, and his Fiona or followers chasing each other from island to island, striding from mountain to mountain, or crossing a frith at a hop, with the help of his spear. There was much of enchantments, fairies, goblins, incantation rhimes, and the second fight. When I heard those of one country, I heard all ; for they all repeated in general the same stories : and when I had the narration of a few, I had every thing.

thing. This, however, did not relax my enquiries. I believed these to be the *compositions of the 15th century*; and beyond the next mountain, in the next valley, or the neighbouring island, something of the *genuine Ossian's* poetry might have remained. I therefore traversed and pervaded the whole for near six months, but to no purpose, as to Ossian's poetry; and, like every other person who attempts to prove or procure evidence for the genuineness of those poems, only discovered, that, by a certain “intellectual retrogradation, I knew less, the “more I heard of it.”

In the mean time I did not forget MSS.—Since I could not find the poems in the mouths of the people, I concluded, if they existed at all, that Mr. Macpherson must have found them in MSS.; but as I knew the Earfe was never written, I began to despair and to doubt. Some told me such a person had a MS. who, upon interrogation, sent me to another, and he to a third, and

so on in a circle, until at length one told me Mr. Macpherson had carried them all to London. I saw one, however, in the possession of Mr. Macintyre of Glenace, Argyleshire; which is mentioned by Mr. Smith, I think, as containing some poems of Ossian. This is as true as the rest of the story. The manuscript is on parchment: I examined it: it contains only some Irish genealogy. It is written in the Irish character, dialect, and contraction. It is intelligible to no Highlander, who has not studied the Irish written dialect; nor is there one Scotchman I could ever find out, not excepting Mr. Macpherson himself, that can decypher them; neither could I, till after much study, and consultation of a variety of keys to the reading of Irish manuscripts. It contains not a line of Ossian's poetry; if it does, why did not Mr. Smith transcribe it, and give us some specimens in his Dissertation?

Having made this fruitless enquiry  
after

after the *genuine Ossian's* poetry, from which I only learned there never had been any, I passed over to Ireland, there also to pursue Ossian, and other enquiries. I rummaged, with the consent of Dr. Leland, Trinity College library — examined manuscripts — had different persons, who understood the character and language, in pay — conversed with all who might know any thing of the matter—and, after all, could discover no such poetry as Mr. Macpherson's ; but that the Irish had been more careful than the Highlanders, who committed to writing even those *compositions of the fifteenth century*. Those, as Mr. Macpherson observes, are best left in the obscurity of the original. There are, however, considerable remains of ancient Irish learning in manuscripts of great antiquity. For a list of these, I refer the curious to Bishop Nicholson's Irish Historical Library.

Since it is very certain that the Irish had the use of letters at least as early as the

the time of Ossian, who was a real character, though not the author of Mr. Macpherson's Poems, Fingal and Temora; and since it is clear from authentic history, and the consent of all the people of the Highlands, that Fingal and Ossian were Irish; how comes it neither Ossian himself, nor any cotemporary, nor any succeeding bard or writer, if they have been orally recited, has collected and committed them to writing? Are the compositions of the fifteenth century more worth notice than those of the *genuine Ossian*? And Mr. Macpherson declares, they have been found, a few years ago, in the mouths of the people. It is impossible, if they ever existed, that the bards and others, who could write, within these three last centuries, should not have collected them. Whatever songs and episodes Ossian sung, did not long survive himself; and it was difficult for former bards to anticipate the compositions of the age of chivalry, unless they

they had as much of the second sight as of the poetical genius.

I would not wish to appear to derogate from the real honour and antiquity of Scotland ; that can never be affected by the loss of these poems : but when I am conscious, that without a knowledge of Irish learning, we can know nothing of the Earse as a tongue, (the Irish being the studied language, and the Earse only a distant provincial dialect) I cannot but express my astonishment at the arrogance of any man, who, to make way for the production of 1762, would destroy all the archives which the Irish, acknowledged by all the world to have been in the eighth century the most learned nation in Europe, have been for ages labouring to produce. When the Highlander knows nothing of Irish learning, he knows nothing of himself ; and when Irish history is lost, Highland genealogy becomes very vague. The Irish had laws, many of which have come down to our

own days, written in the ancient language. Fordun and Buchanan, although some centuries back, having no knowledge of their own origin, received the list of their ancient kings, as recorded in the *Chron. Scotorum*, and other Irish books. The vernacular tongue, unlike to Scotland and England, was the vehicle of their laws, teaching, and pleading. They very early had a regulated church, governed by an hierarchy, before the liturgy of Rome was received, and under their own kings, who always spoke the language of the country. When Rome obtained the management of spiritual affairs, Greek and Roman learning became more common, but through the medium of the Galic ; for, different from England, Scotland, and the other states of Europe, their laws and state-business were not transacted in Latin until the English, in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First, established that practice.

Until the Reformation, they had all sorts of schools and colleges : and it was

was not until Elizabeth ordered English to be taught in all schools, and erected Trinity College at Dublin, that these were extinguished. Thither the youth of England, and other countries, went for education ; and all the popular stories of the Highlands at this day agree, that every chieftain went thither for education and the use of arms, from the fourth century until the Reformation. Icolumkill was first founded by the munificence of the Irish ; and all the abbots and monks belonging to it, one abbot only excepted, until its dissolution, were Irish. All the Highland clergy not only studied but received ordination in Ireland. The clergy of the Islands especially, and those of the western coast, were frequently natives of Ireland. Hence it happens, that all the poetical compositions, stories, fables, &c. of any antiquity, which are repeated in the Highlands at this day, are confessedly in the Irish Galic. Whatever bards existed in the Highlands, received

received their education at the Irish academies ; and every stanza that is remarkably fine or obscure, is still called *Gallic aboimhan Eirionnach*, i. e. *deep Irish*.

No argument can be adduced in favour of Highland learning, from their ancient laws ; for none, according to Mr. Macpherson himself, ever existed, except the will of the chieftain, until some partial and faint influences of it were felt in the reign of the latter Jameses. Private property has not been legally ascertained until very lately ; for the extent of a chief's territory depended on the number and valour of his vassals and followers. Hence it is, that few chieftains at this day can shew charters of any considerable date. But I can shew, from the language of religion, for although Earfe was never the vehicle of learning, and fierce chieftains would not submit to civil government, yet religion, blended with superstition, was in some degree acknowledged by

F them,

them, nay, from even the stile of the pulpit at present in the Highlands, and the few books of piety they have lately published, that the Irish Galic was the language of law, divinity, and poetry. The common Catechism, the Confession of Faith, the version of the Psalms sung in churches, are written in Irish; and the language of the minister when he preacheth, and the extemporaneous effusion of the peasant's prayer, border upon it. As they received in the Highlands their knowledge of the Christian religion from Icolumkill, and Icolumkill from Ireland, all the terms in divinity are immediately Irish, and in the remote parts of the Highlands, at this day, not well understood. The Earse dialect is rather barren of words, having never been cultivated; and the preacher that introduceth any idea beyond the Calvinistic system, is difficultly understood.—It will be in vain to reason abstractedly, even on morality; and the audience, not only strangers to the sentiment,

timent, but even to the expression, cannot always comprehend the speaker.

All the Scotch historians together, have recorded that Scotland received their first kings from Ireland; and Mr. Macpherson allows Fingal's ancestors to have been Irish. The family of Argyle are still styled *Sliochd Dhiarmid*, i. e. the descendants of Dermid, an Irish chief; and Mackenzie and Macdonal are universally acknowledged, and the Scotch peerage and Herald's Office confirm it to be of Irish descent. In like manner, all the considerable Highland families may be shewn to have sprung from the same, at least from a foreign line.

Dr. Blair, after saying much from *internal evidence*, to prove the *remote antiquity* of Ossian's poems, proceeds, in an Appendix to his Dissertation, to Facts, the only method from which any success in establishing the authenticity of his favourite poems could be expected. — “ I had not,” says he, “ the least suspicion, when this Dissertation was

“ first published, that there was any occasion for supporting their authenticity as genuine productions of the Highlands of Scotland; as translations from the Galic language, not for-  
“ geries of a supposed translator. In Scotland their authenticity was never called in question. I had myself particular reason to be fully satisfied concerning it. My knowledge of Mr. Macpherson's personal honour and integrity, gave me full assurance of his being incapable of putting such a gross imposition, first upon his friends, and then upon the public.”

—Whatever the Doctor's knowledge of Mr. Macpherson's personal honour then might be, I think he has had reason, by this time, to be of a different opinion ; for, to use the Doctor's own expression, “ Mr. Macpherson has not done what he ought to his friends and the public.” — He certainly promised to publish, or deposit them in a library ;

library; neither of which has been, and neither will be done.

The ingenious *translator* got the Doctor fairly engaged in a controversy, to which his taste of the belles lettres greatly inclined him, and then left him to battle it as he could.

The Doctor says, " If the question " had been concerning manuscripts " brought from some distant and un- " known region with which we had no " intercourse; or concerning transla- " tions from an Asiatic or American " language, which scarce any body un- " derstood, suspicions might naturally " have arisen, and an author's assertion " been anxiously and scrupulously weigh- " ed: but in case of a literal translation, " professed to be given of old tradition- " ary poems of our own country; of " poems asserted to be known in the " original by many thousand inhabi- " tants of Great Britain, such extreme " scepticism is altogether out of place."

—In this case which the Doctor puts,

as few might understand an Asiatic or American language, it might be a very difficult matter entirely to satisfy the doubts of those who thought proper to be infidels; but in the case of Ossian, there are numbers in Scotland and Ireland who understand the Galic, and any reasonable evidence produced, would naturally have its due effect.—Where is the evidence? Is it what it ought to be? Where is the original? — When the controversy was new, and the poems but just published, one would think the Editor, from views of interest, regard to his country and truth, and from respect to the public, would shew the original; yet none of these considerations had weight with him. The truth is, he had no original to produce, and it was too great trouble to sit down to translate so much into Galic. But the confidence, notwithstanding, with which the authenticity is asserted, without any evidence, is no great degree of modesty. “ Either the *author* must have had the “ influence

" influence to engage as confederates in  
 " the fraud all the natives of the High-  
 " lands and Islands, or we should, long  
 " ere this time, have heard their united  
 " voice exclaiming, These are not our  
 " poems, nor what we were accustomed  
 " to hear from our bards, or our fa-  
 " thers." The answer to this argument  
 is very plain — The Highlanders and  
 Scotch, very partial to their country and  
 antiquities, although the translation  
 might differ from what they might  
 have heard repeated, would not take the  
 trouble to detect it, as even that detec-  
 tion might be understood as an argu-  
 ment against their genuineness. They  
 were glad of this new and unknown  
 honour; and many of the names of the  
 heroes in the poems being familiar to  
 their ears, of which they had often  
 heard mention made in the tales and  
 fables of the Highlands in their youth-  
 ful years, and, in some degree, at this  
 day, could be easily led, by a little "*Ca-*  
 " *ledonian bigotry*," not only to believe,

but to vouch for their being a “literal  
 “ translation of the poems of Ossian,  
 “ with which they had been familiar in  
 “ their infancy.” From this complexion  
 and disposition, though I agree with  
 Doctor Johnson, that they had not a  
 “ settled purpose to deceive,” the persons  
 whom Dr. Blair produceth as vouchers  
 of the truth of Ossian, have been  
 led to give in their names, not doubt-  
 ing but Mr. Macpherson would perform  
 his promise to the public of printing  
 them, or depositing the Galic original in  
 some library: but both the Doctor, who  
 has published the names, and those who  
 permitted him, have been handsomely  
 treated by the *translator*.

“ But as reasoning alone is not apt to  
 “ make much impression, where suspi-  
 “ cions have been entertained concern-  
 “ ing a matter of fact, it was thought  
 “ proper to have recourse to express  
 “ testimonies.”—I am glad the Doctor  
 and I agree with regard to the nature  
 of the evidence that in such a case can  
 be

be indisputable, which is facts. We differ only in this, that the Doctor gives implicit faith to the testimony of gentlemen, in some degree concerned, without enquiring into the evidence which they themselves had for their belief; and that I do not give my assent to a proposition upon the testimony of any man, however respectable, if a party concerned, unless he give reasonable and convincing evidence of his belief, or produce facts that are indisputable.—The honour of the Highlands was concerned; therefore evidence more convincing than signatures and *ipse dixit*s ought to be shewn; especially when the nature of the case admits of it; for the originals are said to be in the *translator's* possession, and a sight of them may be easily procured. The Doctor, however, admits of signatures and *ipse dixit*s as indisputable; I refuse credit to them, and demand a sight of the original, the manuscripts they talk of.—

Much good-nature, a desire to befriend

Mr.

Mr. Macpherson, knowledge of his personal honour, and an enthusiasm natural to men who are long habituated to the study of the Belles Lettres, insensibly led the Doctor to admit of testimony which a man more circumspect would refuse, and especially when having such an opportunity as he then had of informing himself better. But what Dr. Johnson says is true: “The people of “the Low Countries know as little of “the Highlands as the English them-“selves.”

When I travelled in the Highlands, I made it my business to see as many as resided in the country, of those gentlemen whose names the Doctor has made use of. Mr. Donal Macqueen, minister of Killmuir, in the Isle of Sky, is the first name who vouches for Mr. Macpherson’s translation “being a literal “one,” and “that the original was re-“peated by numbers, in every part of “the Highlands.” This is the learned minister who chose to be silent when interrogated

interrogated on this subject by Doctor Johnson ; and although he gave his signature to Dr. Blair, as a voucher for the authenticity, to my certain knowledge, he is not in possession of a line of the originals, although long in search of them. He wished to procure me some, but knew not how. He knows the *compositions of the fifteenth century* as well as others. Is it possible that such a learned minister, residing on the very island where the greatest part of the poems are said to have been got, who vouched for the authenticity of them so soon as they were published, declared they were in every body's mouth, and, knowing the use of pen, ink, and paper, would not take some, at least, of them down in writing to convince the world ? Yet it is a truth, in 1778 this gentleman could not produce one line of them.—Mr. Donald Macleod, minister of Glenelg, I think, lodged Mr. Macpherson on his journey. He has vouched also for the authenticity ; yet though I challenged

him to produce three lines of the original, he could not shew one. Other rhimes, of little merit, he had enough.

Mr. Niel Macleod, one of the ministers of Mull, vouched, but could not, although desirous of it, favour me with one line. He sent for different people, who *he* thought were possessed of them, but they produced only the *compositions of the fifteenth century*.

Mr. Mac Aulay, chaplain to the 88th regiment, is mentioned also as a voucher. He knows just as much of the poems as his above brethren. — I have conversed with Mr. Macaulay on the subject.

‘ Lachlan Macpherson, of Strathmashie, Esquire, gives a very full and explicit testimony, from particular knowledge, in the following words :  
 “ That in the year 1760, he accompanied Mr. Macpherson during some part of his journey through the Highlands, in search of the poems of Ossian : that he assisted him in collecting them : that he took down from “ oral

“ oral tradition, and transcribed from  
“ old manuscripts, by far the greatest  
“ part of those pieces Mr. Macpherson  
“ has published: that since the publi-  
“ cation, he has carefully compared the  
“ translation with the copies of the ori-  
“ ginals in his hands, and that he finds  
“ it amazingly literal! even to such a  
“ degree as often to preserve the ca-  
“ dence of the Galic versification.”—If  
Mr. Macpherson, of Strathmashie, had  
“ copies of the original in his own  
“ hands,” why not shew them? Why  
did not the Doctor ask them, and depo-  
fit them in the Advocate’s or Univer-  
sity’s library? Where are they now?  
Mr. Macpherson is dead, and his manu-  
scripts, I suppose they will say, have  
been buried with him! It were easy  
to shew them, if they had them; but  
every circumstance confirms the fraud  
and imposture.

The Doctor says further, “ That Sir  
“ James Macdonal assured him, that af-  
“ ter having made, at his desire, all the  
“ enquiries

“enquiries he could, he entertained no  
“doubt of the authenticity: that he  
“lately heard several parts of them re-  
“peated in the original. — This parti-  
“cular must have great weight, as it is  
“well known how much the judgment  
“of Sir James deserves to be relied  
“upon, in every thing that relates to  
“literature and taste.” — This particular  
must have great weight, indeed, to dis-  
prove the authenticity; as a gentleman  
of Sir James's learning and taste would  
not be satisfied with hearing lines re-  
cited, but would send for Mr. Donald  
Macqueen, the *learned* minister of his  
own parish, alluded to by Dr. Johnson,  
and mentioned above as a voucher, and  
would have taken down the lines in  
writing. — When a controversy was  
known to be on foot, is it not absurd  
to suppose, that a gentleman of the first-  
rate abilities of the age, would neglect  
such an opportunity of committing to  
writing what might be soon irretriev-  
ably lost? Sir James would certainly,

if

if he had heard them, have seen them written, and sent them out to Edinburgh to the Doctor, as an incontrovertible fact; and I am amazed the Doctor did not request it of him.

“ Desirous, however,” continues the Doctor, “ to have this translation particularly compared with the oral editions of any who had parts of the original distinctly on their memory, I applied to several clergymen, to make enquiry in their respective parishes concerning such persons, and to compare what they rehearsed with the printed version. Accordingly, from Mr. John Macpherson, minister of Slate, in Sky; Mr. Niel Macleod, minister in Mull; Mr. Macnicol, minister in South Uist; Mr. Donald Macqueen, minister of Kilmuir, in Sky; and Mr. Donald Macleod, minister of Glenelg; I have had reports on this head, containing distinct and explicit testimonies to almost the whole epic poem of Fingal, from beginning to end,

“ end, and to several of the lesser poems;  
“ rehearsed in their presence, and com-  
“ pared by themselves with the printed  
“ translations.” Three of these five mi-  
nisters I know, and waited upon them  
when I travelled in that country for in-  
formation. I begged their assistance in  
procuring a small specimen of Ossian;  
which they granted; but, in place of  
going to their cabinet for manuscripts;  
or copies of them, as I expected, appli-  
cation was made to some old man, or  
superannuated fidler, who repeated over  
again the tales of the *fifteenth century*.  
If this be not true, let Messieurs Mac-  
queen and Macleod contradict it, and  
produce the originals if they can. Ei-  
ther the Doctor, or these gentlemen,  
have taken too much liberty with mat-  
ter of fact; or the one has imposed on  
the other, and all upon themselves, by  
a too great desire to establish an impos-  
ture, because it brought an ideal ho-  
nour to the Highlands, and that some  
of the names in their popular tales were  
inserted.

infested. It is very singular, that nobody in the Highlands has attempted a complete Galic translation of Macpherson's Fingal and Temora. Had it been done twelve years ago, it would be no difficult matter to set it off as the composition of Ossian; but now it is too late.— In my tour in the Highlands, a respectable minister begged I would set about a translation of Fingal, and that he and others would undertake to prove it the composition of Ossian, and procure affidavits for that purpose. We need not, therefore, be surprized to hear Highlanders confidently talk of their having seen and heard them repeated, although none can produce a specimen. — If a man says he has a gold watch in his pocket, and I deny it; if he has it, is there any thing easier than convincing me, by shewing it? But to persist in affirming that he has it, and publishing dissertations to prove it; to rail, and abuse all who will not believe him, is an insult on the party, and a “ degree of

G      “ stubborn

“ stubborn audacity the world has hitherto been unacquainted with.” — It is the last subterfuge of guilt.

There has been lately published at London, a book entitled, *Remarks on Dr. Johnson's Tour into the Hebrides*. This book has been many years in composing. It underwent a vast variety of editions in manuscript, and has been corrected, amended, and improved by many hands in Scotland ; and, finding its way to London, was prepared for the press by a friendly embellisher. These amendments and additions are ascribed by many to Mr. Macpherson himself. How far this is true, I do not pretend to say ; but I am certain it has been done by some person who has lived in England, some man different from the ostensible author ; for there are such local circumstances mentioned in the book, as a person who had never been south of the Tweed, could not have been acquainted with. If it be Mr. Macpherson's

pherson's composition, it is his last effort in this controversy.

I shall not take up my time with making observations on the illiberali- ties and scurrilities of which it is made up ; but only will point out to the world such a fresh instance of imposture as will astonish, in which the au- thor triumphs as having proved the au- thenticity of Ossian's poems. — The book was written on purpose to establish the genuineness of the poems. How far it has succeeded, appears from the following fraud, the only argument ad- duced : — “ But as Dr. Johnson may “ think it too great a trouble to travel “ again to the Highlands for a sight of “ old manuscripts, I shall put him on a “ way of being satisfied nearer home. “ If he will but call some morning on “ John Mackenzie, Esq; of the Tem- “ ple, Secretary to the Highland So- “ ciety, he will find in London more “ volumes in the Galic language and “ character, than perhaps he will be

G 2      “ pleased

“ pleased to look at, after what he has said.” “ Among these is a volume, which contains some of Ossian’s poems.”—On reading the last sentence, I was overjoyed that the originals of Ossian were at last discovered, notwithstanding my own bad success in meeting with them. Being impatient to see them, I accordingly lost no time in waiting on Mr. Mackenzie; and, having looking over these volumes in manuscript, found no compositions of Ossian therein! They are manuscripts written in the Irish dialect and character, on the subject of Irish and Highland genealogy.—We have every reason to believe that this is the very manuscript, if any, that was left at Becket’s by Mr. Macpherson some time ago, with a view to impose it as that of Ossian; for I am credibly informed, this very piece was sent to Mr. Mackenzie by him.

As the writer of the Remarks seems himself entirely ignorant of the contents of that manuscript, being a stranger to the

the Irish character and contractions, it was vainly believed by him and his partizans, that with an old Irish manuscript on genealogy, they might prove the originality of Ossian.

This last attempt to deceive, is an insult more glaring than the imposture it was intended to support; and which determined me not to overlook it. Nor is this the only literary imposture that has been attempted by a Scotchman.—A Lauder endeavoured to prove Milton's *Paradise Lost* a plagiarism, by liberal quotations from his countryman Hog's translation of Milton into Latin, by false quotations from Mafenius, Staphorstus, Taubmannus, &c. with Latin lines of his own forging, until detected by Dr. Douglas. If Mr. Lauder could for a time impose on the public, by forging Latin verses, why not Mr. Macpherson be able to translate a few lines from English into Galic?

Another person wished to prove the *Æneid Earse*, because “*Arma virumque*  
“*cano,*”

“ cano,” and “ Airm ’s am fear canam” have the same meaning, and nearly the the same sound.

I have now finished what I meant to say on this subject. The truth is ascertained, and, I believe, the public will not be favoured with any more translations of *Galic poems*, nor *Dissertations* for or against the authenticity of Ossian; as the defenders of that cause have not hitherto been able to produce an original, though some disingenuous attempts have been used. Like the author of the Remarks, they have chosen to let the imaginary *original* remain in the obscurity, and to themselves unintelligible state, of the Irish characters! They have often been called on to produce three lines, yet nobody has been able to shew them.—They are still called on to shew the original, with proper and competent vouchers of the authenticity, and proofs that there is no collusion; for nothing but the original can persuade. — Ten thousand dissertations avail nothing; and any

any thing further on the subject, but a sight of the original, shall have no attention paid it.

This relation of facts which I have given, may be contradicted, but can never be overborne; for facts are stubborn things: there is no contending with them but by facts.

### F I N I S.

---

\* \* \* A gentleman promised to ornament a scolloped shell with silver, if I should bring him one from the Highlands, and to swear it was the identical shell out of which Fingal used to drink!







